

Aquatic Park Stop

#5 Art and Architecture in Aquatic Park: Form and Function

As you stand here at the edge of Aquatic Park lagoon think of some of the most recognizable structures in the modern day world: the Eiffel Tower, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Roman Coliseum. All are easily identifiable because of their unique form and each tells a story about culture, history, and beauty through its design.

The structures of Aquatic Park are no different. The year was 1935 and the great depression was weighting heavy on all aspects of life within the United States. Jobs were scarce, and for many the future showed few signs of promise. The structures here at Aquatic Park were built in an era in which hope for a better future was valued almost as highly as the structures themselves.

These structures were originally constructed to serve the public's outdoor recreation needs. Look around at the white buildings and towers located near the beach. See if you can identify which of the white painted structures was designed to house changing rooms, a restaurant, and hot showers. Can you spot smaller buildings near the beach designed to serve as lifeguard stations, concession stands, and bathrooms. If you look closely you may even find the large towers built to hold loudspeakers for broadcasting information about the sporting events in the Bay to spectators on land.

The architectural style of the structures is known as stream-lined "Moderne." The designs focus on curved surfaces and uninterrupted smooth lines mirroring ideals of speed and efficiency. The structures actually reflect a hope for the future. They represent the concept of a futuristic society in which sleek mechanized technology would bring about peace and stability.

Much like the architect who designed the structures, the artists hired to decorate them chose not to reflect on the grim reality of the era but focused on the abstract. A variety of American artists worked on the project such as: Hilaire Hiler, Sargent Johnson, Beniamino Bufano, and Richard Ayer. Their innovative works, designed around an ocean motif, gave physical form through paint, sculpture, and tile to an escape which could be found only in the mind's eye. We invite you to visit the largest of these buildings to view their artwork for yourself.

Today the structures and art of Aquatic Park are preserved and maintained by San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, a unit of the National Park Service. National Parks around the country are links to our nation's history. Here in San Francisco the structures and art of Aquatic Park serve as a reminder of the past, a record of progress, and stand as a testament to the enduring hopes of mankind.